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FOREIGN NEWS ON APPLES

DISTRIBUTION OF APPLES THROUGH BRISTOL

Bristol, which now has a population of 400,000, and with 2,500,000 people within a radius of 50 miles, was one of the first English ports to trade with the United States, but American fruits have not been an important article of commerce through that port. Direct importation of apples is being made from Canada and the United States, however, with the receipts of barreled apples figuring more prominently than those of boxed varieties. Fruit from the Mediterranean ports has come to Bristol for a long time, and between 30 and 40 per cent of the West Indian and Central American bananas imported into Great Britain, are discharged here. The good location of the port for distributing to southern England, and the special discharging machinery available, have encouraged increasing use of Bristol as a fruit distributing point.

Facilities for Handling American Fruits.

Bristol has very good dock and harbor facilities. Most of the American apples are discharged at the British docks, very close to the sales room of the Bristol Green Fruit Auction. Canadian apples are discharged very largely at Avonmouth, six miles from the centre of the city. Here the Corporation of Bristol has very modern port facilities, with a full equipment of electric cranes, electric trucks, trackage, etc. that facilitate rapid and efficient handling. Bananas are also discharged at Avonmouth.

Shipping facilities between the United States and Bristol consist of the services of the Bristol City Line and the Oriole Line, the latter operating ships of the United States Shipping Board. Each line has a sailing from New York about every two weeks. No refrigerator ships from the Pacific Coast call at Bristol. The ships serving Bristol are general cargo carriers and are not as well equipped for carrying fruit as lines serving other ports.

Auction Methods and Fruit Brokers.

American and Canadian apples landed at Bristol are sold at auction to buyers of Bristol and the surrounding territory of 50 to 75 miles radius. Four brokers receive and classify the fruit, as consigned to each, and do the selling. Although Monday is a favorite sale day, an auction may be called on any day of the week except Saturday to accommodate the arrival of cargoes. The condition of the fruit governs the brokers in calling a special auction.

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A sample is withdrawn for various lots, usually about one sample for 50 packages, and this is shown in a room below the sales room in Coopers Hall. A sales room suitable for holding 100 to 125 buyers has been fitted up and should be adequate for selling current receipts. Plans are under way to provide a lift, so that samples may be shown in the sales room at the moment of sale.

The buyers of Bristol have a strong association. This body governs the membership of those who may buy at the auctions. The intention is to limit the buying to bona fide wholesale dealers in the region of Bristol. The brokers have two members on a committee of six to consider the applications for membership in the Buyers' Association.

Apples are catalogued in the usual manner and in the general practice of selling there are no unusual features. The names of brokers in Bristol may be secured by addressing the Foreign Service, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Washington, D. C.

Cold Storage Facilities.

Bristol has very good cold storage facilities of new construction at Avonmouth. They are municipally owned, are convenient to the quay where fruit is unloaded and have trackage alongside. Temperatures will be given as requested. Cooler space is available for about 900 tons (36,000 boxes or 12,000 barrels).

Demand and Competition.

The demand for apples in Bristol is more limited than it is in other ports in Great Britain and also more limited than it is for citrus fruits. Cardiff tends to supply the demand from the industrial towns of the south of Wales, while to the south and east of Bristol is an agricultural area which not only would not buy as many apples as an industrial section, but is supplied by the orchards of Devonshire and adjacent counties. When there is a good English crop very few apples are required in Bristol up to January 1st. When not interfered with by home production the market will take from 2,000 to 3,000 barrels and up to 3,000 boxes per week.

Red varieties are preferred to yellow apples. The York Imperial is a favorite in the market. Popular sizes in boxed apples are from 175 to 200.

Costs of Selling.

The usual charges for selling apples are a basic commission of 3 per cent of sales, together with an inclusive handling charge amounting to 44¢ on barrels and 22¢ on boxes.

Oranges and Grapefruit.

Bristol is vastly more important as a market for oranges than it is for apples. During the past winter it has been receiving about 15,000 cases of Spanish oranges each week, and has taken practically as many as were shipped to Glasgow.

Distribution of Bananas through Bristol.

During 1923 one firm discharged 4,021,783 bunches of bananas at Bristol, representing 33.9 per cent of the banana imports of the United Kingdom. The operations of this company offer an object lesson to American apple producers, who are interested in what can be done in systematic and economical distribution in foreign markets. By special conveying machinery the fruit is transferred from the holds of the ships to the railway cars on the quay in an efficient and economical manner. A ship-load of bananas arrives nearly every week and discharges its cargo in one day's time. Immediate despatch is made to branch houses in all parts of the South of England.

Conclusions and Remarks.

Boxed apples shipped via the Panama Canal in refrigerator ships are very popular in this market, though they are received here only after re-shipment from Southampton, London or Liverpool.

Brokers do not consider that the grading of pacific Northwest apples can be improved upon. This was not the case with barreled apples, Virginia growers and packers of which came in for the most complaint. The York Imperial of the Virginia seems to be an ideal apple for this market, but, as in other British markets, some Virginia growers have made a name for themselves in "dishonest packing". Some growers in western New York also shared in this condemnation. To the British buyer the facing of barrels means a "dishonest pack", regardless of whether or not the contents of the barrel meets grading rules 100 per cent.

Brokers state that first of all the barrel should have apples in the face that are representative, as to size and quality, of the balance of the package. The sizing of apples and what is marked on the head of the barrel is of secondary importance, although the sizing of the fruit would be desirable.

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